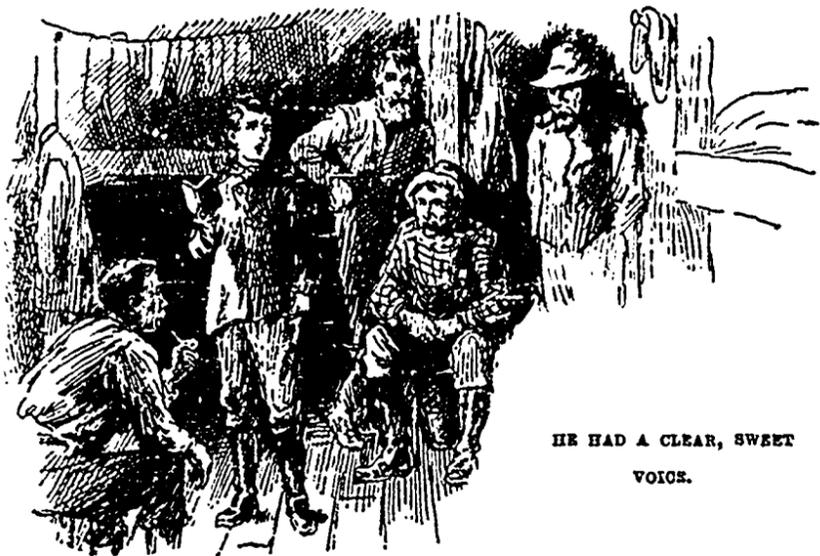


In the Forefront of the Fire.

BY J. MACDONALD OXLEY.

When Hector Mackay, the youngest son of "Big Sandy," as the foreman of one of Hurdman & Moore's lumbering shanties was generally called, begged to be allowed to accompany his father to the woods for the winter's work, Mr. Mackay at first would not hear of it.



HE HAD A CLEAR, SWEET VOICE.

Hector was his favourite son, being of a more gentle, affectionate nature than his burly brothers; and the father feared that his slight frame might not be strong enough to withstand the rough and arduous life of the shanty. Moreover, of the four boys Hector alone had seemed to follow their mother's religion; and although Big Sandy made small pretensions to piety himself, he had entire respect for it when he found it sincere. Now, Hector's religion was as genuine as it was unobtrusive. The foreman put perfect faith in his son, and he therefore shrank from the idea of exposing his spiritual nature to the coarse atmosphere of the shanty, just as he did from risking his delicate constitution in the rude camp. And yet Hector argued him out of both objections, and succeeded in winning his consent to his going back with him into the woods.

"So be it, then, my laddie," was the foreman's final word. "I can't stand against your coaxing any longer. Since ye maun go, ye may go, and I don't mind saying I'll be right glad of your company."

Right glad, too, was Hector to carry his point; and in high spirits he said good-bye to his mother, and with his clothes and some books packed tightly into a canvas bag, constituting his whole outfit, took his place behind the pair of stout horses that would bear the foreman and himself away into the depths of the lumber district.

Among the books were two that he loved dearly. They were his Bible and a collection of "Gospel Hymns" with the music. With the contents of both volumes he was more familiar than many boys of his age; and the thought was in his mind, although he had not expressed it to his father, that if the men in the shanty would only listen to him, he would like very much to read to them his favourite chapters, and sing to them his special songs. He had a clear, sweet voice, that was well adapted for either reading or singing, and he delighted to use it when he had fitting opportunity.

The winter in the shanty proved to be quite as full of hardship as Big Sandy had anticipated; but it did not have the effect upon Hector that he had apprehended. On the contrary, the plain fare, the hard bed, and the rough-and-ready kind of life, much of it being spent out of doors breathing the cold, pure air of the pine forest, did him a world of good. He grew stouter and stronger every week, and found it easy to perform satisfactorily the various light tasks assigned him.

Not only did he benefit physically, but, instead of the shantymen exercising any deteriorating influence over him, he had not been among them a week before the influence was manifestly the other way. Without his having to say a word, they found out for themselves that oaths hurt him like blows, that foul stories and songs were like foul smells to him, and that if they were willing to restrain their bad habits for his sake he was even more willing to make compensation by telling them stories, and singing them

hymns, the like of which had never been heard in the Black River shanties before. Thus the long winter passed both pleasantly and profitably for Hector; and, as the result of the shantymen's toil, a large quantity of square timber had been got out to be floated down to Quebec. It was a particularly fine lot, and, prices being good, the foreman was very anxious to get the drive safely and speedily out into the broad, deep bosom of the Ottawa. All hands, accordingly, had been working very hard, and Hector found the occupation of watching them, and helping as he could, intensely interesting.



HE HAD A CLEAR, SWEET VOICE.

The men had good reason to exert themselves to the utmost, for which the spring had come a prolonged drought, which gave them no small anxiety, since if the rain held off many days more the water in the rivers and streams would get so low as to "stick the drive," and thus "hang up" the product of their winter's work until the following spring. Instead of the sorely needed rain, there were furious gales of wind, under whose influence, aided by the unclouded sun, the greath forest of pine that clothed the country became as dry as timber, and ready to flash into devouring flame at the slightest provocation.

At last, by dint of unsparing exertion, and such constant risking of life in running rapids and breaking up "jams" as only "river-drivers" know of, the great army of ponderous "sticks," each one from twenty to thirty feet in length, and from eighteen inches to three feet in length, and from eighteen inches to three feet square, had been brought within about thirty miles of the Ottawa. Only a few rapids and shoals, joining broad, easy stretches of deep water, had yet to be reckoned with, and then the worst of the work would be over.

"We're doing fine, boys," said Big Sandy at the camp-fire, rubbing his horny palms together gleefully. "If we could only get a couple of days' rain now, we'd just sail along the rest of the way." But the rain seemed as far away as ever that night. The sun set in a perfect blaze of red, and the wind blew strong and steady from the west.

"Rain long way off still," said Jean Baptiste, the plump cook of the camp, who rather prided himself upon being weather-wise. "Dis river soon dry up; not much water left now."

"You dry up yourself, Johnny," shouted Big Sandy, throwing a bit of bark at him; "none of your croaking here. You don't know any more about it than the rest of us."

"Maybe no," retorted the cook, shaking his head knowingly. "Hope not, any way."

The days that followed, however, quite fulfilled Jean Baptiste's forecast. Not a drop of rain fell, and the eagerly desired freshet showed no signs of coming to the lumbermen's assistance.

"It's no use trying to get through with this amount of water," Sandy announced, some evenings later. "I'll have to go back to Manitou dam and let out the reserve. I reckon that will carry us through all right."

No sooner had he spoken than Hector piped up with the request, "May I go, too, father?"

"You'll be only in the way, but I'll not say ye nay," was the somewhat rough response.

"Oh! I'll help all I can," responded Hector cheerfully.

Accordingly, the next morning, taking fourteen of the gang with him, and a long, swift canoe called a "racer," the foreman went back up the Manitou to the reserve dam. This had been built without a waste gate; and consequently, in order to let the water loose, it was

necessary to throw out the stones, and cut away the logs and sheeting—a job that gave all hands about five hours of hard work, during which they hardly looked about them.

In the meantime the wind arose, and before their work was finished it was blowing a regular gale. The sun had been shining brightly all morning, but suddenly a dark cloud appeared in the west, and swiftly sped across the sky until it had obscured the sun, and attracted the attention of Hector, who at once called to his father to ask its meaning. At the same moment a long, low, rumbling sound like distant thunder, but as continuous as the rushing of a long express train over an iron bridge, made itself heard, and with a shout of alarm Big Sandy called out to the men:

"The timber's a-fire, and the wind's blowing this way. We must make the lake before the fire reaches us, or we're done for."

Instantly there was a stampede for the canoe, into which the men tumbled pell-mell, and a couple of minutes later the water was darting through the water at the bidding of many strong pairs of arms.

"Paddle for your lives, boys!" shouted Big Sandy, making his stout steersman's blade bend at every stroke, while the stalwart men put their whole strength into their work, sending the long canoe shooting like an arrow through the foaming stream, now swollen by the addition of the reserve water. In the bow crouched Hector, now keeping an eye ahead so as to give warning of rocks and shallows, now glancing anxiously behind at the awful pursuer.

They had a long stretch of narrow river to pass through, where to be caught by the fire meant certain death from falling trees or scorching flame, ere they could get out upon the broad lake, which offered their only chance of escape. Not a word was spoken save by Sandy, who from time to time cried out encouragingly to the straining, sweating paddlers:

"That's the way to do it, boys; give it to her for all you're worth. Keep that up, and we'll be all right."

Above their heads towered a black, appalling arch of smoke, borne by the blast in advance of the flames, out of whose sable bosom fiery flakes of moss or glowing fragments of wood were falling like Tartarean hail. As the canoe shot down the stream, it was accompanied along the banks by an affrighted throng of bears, wolves, lynxes, foxes, and deer; all their mutual fear or ferocity being forgotten in the general panic at the red terror which followed so fast.

"It's mighty rough that we haven't got time to get some of these skins," said Tom Martin, with a longing look at two splendid black bears which were well in the van of the hurrying herd, for Tom was a trapper as well as a shantymen, and he now saw more good dollars' worth of fur than greeted his eyes for years past.

"We'd better make sure of saving our own skins first," retorted Big Sandy grimly. "Paddle away there, and never mind the bears."

The scene as the swift canoe tore along

now kneeling in the bow, praying fervently for their preservation from the awful death that threatened. Observing what he was doing, his father called out in a tone of warm approval:

"That's right, my laddie. We never needed your prayers more. I promise you I'll be a better man if we get out of this alive."

From the countenance of the men it was clear that the foreman was not alone in welcoming Hector's appeal for divine assistance. The thought evidently cheered them all, and when, a minute later, he turned around and in a strong, sweet voice began to sing, "Nearer, my God, to thee," the effect upon them was to revive their waning energies and to put fresh force into their straining strokes.

On they rushed through the foaming water, while Hector sang verse after verse of that beautiful hymn. The fire was ever coming closer as they drew nearer to their goal of safety. As they came to where the stream lost itself in the lake, a great wall of flame seemed to bar their farther progress. Hector was the first to notice it. He at once stopped singing, and betook himself again to prayer. Big Sandy saw it then, and ejaculating, "Lord help us, we're surrounded!" shouted to the men:

"Lay on to it now, boys! Drive her! Drive her! We've got to go through it!"

They grasped their paddles for a supreme effort, bending their heads low to shield them from the burning blast, and straight at the flames they charged. The hot tongues of fire were almost touching them, when a sudden mighty blast of wind parted them to right and left, and through the opening thus providentially made the canoe darted out into the lake, where, by turning off to the south, the pursuing flames were entirely avoided, and they could rest upon their paddles while they breathed the pure air untainted by the smoke of the conflagration.

The moment the paddles paused in their work, Hector began to sing, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow." After a little hesitation his father joined in, and one by one the other men who knew the grand old doxology lent their voices, until the anthem of praise rang out over the lake, opposing its glorious music to the roaring of the relentless flames.

When the singing ceased, Big Sandy heaved a heavy sigh, and, wiping his dripping forehead with the back of his hand, said in a voice whose sincerity there was no questioning: "I've not been the man I ought to have been; but, God helping me, I'll try to be a better one from this day out."

He kept his resolution too, and Hector and his mother soon had the happiness of seeing him become an active worker for the Lord.—The Inglenook.

When Things Don't Suit.

When things don't go to suit you,
And the world seems upside down,
Don't waste the time in fretting.



"LAY ON TO IT NOW, BOYS! DRIVE HER! DRIVE HER!"

was magnificent and terrible beyond all description. The flames curled fiercely over the tops of pines that towered full a hundred feet in the air, and great billows of smoke, in marvellous shades of blue, black, purple, and blood-red, rolled up to the sky.

The men were perfectly silent now, the only voice being Big Sandy's, as he from time to time urged on their paddling. The stream widened as it approached the lake, and Hector no longer found it necessary to keep a look out for dangers ahead. Relieved from his duty, he was

But drive away that frown,
Since life is oft perplexing,
'Tis much the wisest plan
To bear all trials bravely,
And smile whenever you can.

Why should you dread to-morrow,
And thus despoil to-day?
For when you borrow trouble
You always have to pay.
It is a good old maxim,
Which should be often preached—
Don't cross the bridge before you
Until the bridge is reached.